

***ATTACK OF THE BRITISH ON BALTIMORE—MR. INGERSOLL'S HISTORY.**—In the extract published in the Baltimore Patriot of the 23d instant, from Mr. C. J. Ingersoll's History of the War of 1814, as well as in the general public impressions, respecting the attack on Baltimore by the British, there are some errors, of more or less account, which singular opportunities of noting the occurrences of that day, in the region of the Chesapeake Bay, enable the writer of these lines to notice, in a friendly spirit.

It was then the writer's office, under a joint appointment from the State Department and the Commissary General of Prisoners—Col. Monroe and Gen. John Mason,—to act as agent for flags of truce, and for the exchange of prisoners; and in that capacity, to serve as the medium of intercourse, between the Government and the enemy's forces in the Chesapeake Bay, from the commencement to the end of the war;—when he was finally commissioned, jointly with Judge Bayly, father of the present honorable member from Accomac, and the late George Graham, to communicate to the British officer, in command of the forces on this station, the conclusion of the treaty of peace, and to reclaim from him the slaves, territorial and other property in their possession, according to the treaty stipulations.

Some time previous to the arrival of the British fleet, with its transports, at Bermuda, destined then, not for the Chesapeake bay, at all, but for New Orleans, the undersigned was ordered down on business with the commanding officer, and first boarded a frigate, off the mouth of the Patuxent, commanded by Captain Clavell, who, on inquiry, for Admiral Cockburn, replied, that he had "gone to sea," leaving him in command during absence, and to him accordingly the despatches were handed. But before as much time had elapsed, as has done in writing thus far, an officer came to the door and desired to speak with him. Returning, and with a smile at the *ruse de guerre* he was playing, he now said, "I am ordered sir, by signal from Sir George (who was lying ten miles below) to invite you to proceed to his ship, and he begs you will do him the favor to dine with him." The Admiral was then, as it afterwards appeared, on his way to Bermuda, to meet the fleet which he was aware was to rendezvous at that Island, with a view to persuade Sir Alexander Cochrane that it was too early in the season to go to New Orleans, and that the mean time might be more safely and better employed, by a visit in the way of diversion, to the Chesapeake Bay, and thus enable him to destroy Barney's flotilla, which much to his mortification, had so far eluded his grasp.

Such is the true origin of the appearance of that British expedition in the Chesapeake bay, and of the final movement upon and conflagration of the Capitol; for even when they ascended the Patuxent river, in pursuit of the flotilla, which had retired, as it was supposed, to an inaccessible point above Nottingham, the expedition to Washington was not a part of their fixed design: nor was it decided on at last, as General Ross himself told the writer of this, until after the flotilla was blown up. Then, as he said, Admiral Cockburn urged him, he (Ross) having exclusive command of the land forces, to go ahead. "Let us," said he, "now push on, so far as to feel their strength at any rate, and if circumstances require it, we can but fall back to our shipping." Thus, said Genl. Ross, "we moved on until we came in sight of your army at Bladensburg. The men became excited; we made the attack; received while it lasted a deadly fire, but your troops broke and let us on to the Capitol." And here it may be noted, that as well on this occasion, as after the battle of North Point, the British officers often remarked, that whenever they met the American militia, in whatever numbers, the fire they received from them was much more fatal than that encountered in any part of the world. No troops could face them long, said they, if you could only get them to stand. This deadly execution, doubtless, proceeds from the universal use of fire arms in our country, in shooting crows and squirrels, deer and pigeons, woodpeckers and bullfrogs; and from the instinctive habit of taking aim whenever a trigger is pulled. It would be easy to relate numerous particulars incident to the movements against Alexandria and Washington, which would not be without their moral and historical interest, but that we have already digressed from our original purpose, which was not to give a narrative of what happened, but merely to note a few unintentional and, perhaps, unimportant misapprehensions of fact.

On this visit to the enemy upon business growing out of the capture of Washington, the undersigned was instructed to take along with him Mr. Key of Washington, his mission having exclusive reference to the release of Doctor Beans, a venerable cavalier of Prince George's county, who, on the retreat from Washington had been seized in his house, and carried off in the night, under circumstances of gross harshness and indignity. His friends were persuaded that something might be hoped from Mr. Key's tact and persuasive manners, in getting the Doctor released, and though that was effected, as will be seen, by a different influence, Mr. Key's visit ended happily in giving us one national song, that will be as imperishable as the naval renown it will forever serve to celebrate and to cherish. Such was the origin of "The Star Spangled Banner."

On boarding the flag-ship, at the mouth of the Potomac, we were invited to remain and were soon summoned to dinner; the writer being placed next to and on the right of Sir Alexander Cochrane, the commander in-chief, and Mr. Key on the right of Admiral Codrington, Admiral of the Fleet, and since the celebrated "Hero of Navarino." This latter, after the wine had been in free circulation, allowed himself to remark, with somewhat unbecoming freedom, on the character of Commodore Porter, particularly designating his having ordered a British sailor to be tied and flung at the gang-way of his ship, (for insolence) in the Mediterranean. Bye-the-bye, there is no denying there was between our gallant Porter and the British naval officers "no love lost."

The dinner was nearly over before the writer of these lines discovered, from something which was said incidentally, that the plainly-dressed officer next on his right, the most reserved gentleman at the table, was no other than General Ross, the "Hero of Bladensburg." Turning, then, slightly, to regard more particularly one whose name was associated with recent and mortifying occurrences of vandal notoriety, there was yet visible on the left side of his neck a yet unhealed wound, received in the celebrated and bloody battle of Toulouse, where Marshal Soult so skillfully defended himself against a vastly superior force, led on by the "Iron Duke."

Seizing adroitly the first pause which ensued, some warmth of reply to the assault, out of place and so not appropriately made on the character of Porter, whom the writer was proud to regard as a particular and assured friend, General Ross politely invited the writer of these lines to retire with him to the Admiral's cabin, and there first broached the business on which the visit was made, as far as Mr. Key was concerned, he yet remaining with all the residue of the party at the dinner table. "Mr. S," said Gen. Ross, "it gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the kindness with which our officers left at Bladensburg have been treated. All that has been said on that point by the Commissary General of Prisoners, (the late talented General John Mason,) in his letter to me, has been more than confirmed by their own letters; and I wish you, therefore, to say to him and to the friends of Doctor Beans, that on that account, and not from any opinion of his own merit, he shall be released, to return with you." Thus whatever degree of obduracy might have been softened by the eloquence of such a pleader as Mr. Key, it was not put to the test in this instance.

And now for your extract from Ingersoll's History. It says—

"General Ross, accompanied by Admiral Cochrane in the van, proceeded, without resistance, about four miles, &c."

Admiral Cochrane did not land at all. He shifted his flag to the light frigate Surprise, commanded by his son, Sir Thomas Cochrane, and proceeded to the river to direct in person the attack on Fort McHenry: while Admiral Cockburn landed, and proceeded with General Ross.

"The wound (of General Ross) was mortal. He fell into the arms of his aid-de-camp, and lived only long enough to name his wife and to commend his family to the protection of his country."

Admiral Cockburn gave this account of his death to the writer of this: He said—"A soldier came running to me and asked if I knew the General had been shot. No, said I, it is impossible; I parted with him this moment." Admiral C. added, "my impression is that if he could have been borne easily on a good litter to the boat, instead of being jolted down to it in a cart, he might possibly have been saved. Although," he remarked, "I would not like his friends to know that such is my impression, as it would now avail to no good purpose." He further said—"He handed me a locket from his bosom saying give that to my dear wife, and tell her I commend her to my king and my country."

Now as to the plan and particulars of the attack.—The arrangement between the Admiral and General in command was this: With an uncommonly favorable coincidence of fair wind with a high tide, which then existed, and such as rarely occurs, the admiral expected to silence the fort, pass up some light frigates, and then, turning his guns upon the entrenchments, drive away its defences on Loudenslager's Hill, and solet the army in, or up to a position from which the town might be laid under contribution or burnt. The first thing Admiral Cockburn said to the undersigned, the next morning after their retreat, when he waited on Admiral Cochrane for his answer to the despatches, was—even before the usual salutations, and having in view his previously expressed exulting anticipations—"Ah, Mr. S, if it had not been for the sinking of those ships across the channel, 'with the wind and tide we had in our favor,' we should have taken the town; as it was, we flurried you, any how." "A miss, Sir George, is as good as a mile." And here it is due to that meritorious patriot, Commodore Rogers, and to the truth of history, to state, that this saving measure, of sinking the ships, was suggested and executed under his orders, after the British hove in sight.

Then as to the general plan and circumstances of the attack. After General Ross was killed, and Admiral Cockburn, then proceeding with Col. Brooke, had gotten sight or report of the entrenchments, wrote a note to Admiral Cochrane, saying, that if he would go on, in pursuance of their concerted plan, with a feint attack, at midnight, in the rear of the fort, to draw off our forces from the main point of attack and defence, on Loudenslager's Hill, he, Cockburn and Brooke, with the land and naval forces acting under his command, would undertake to capture our entrenchments, "with a loss not exceeding 500 men." To this note the admiral, as he told the writer of this, answered, that as he did not command the land forces, it was not for him to say, but that his advice was, that they should return to the shipping, in view of our preparations and means of defence, "lest they should endanger ulterior objects;" using the very words which afterwards appeared in his despatches home. Of course he did not mention what these ulterior objects were, but it proved to be New Orleans—the "great original purpose of the expedition," and from which they had been diverted at the urgent instance of Admiral Cockburn, with whom it had become a matter of pride to demolish Barney's flotilla. But, as after he received the note from Cockburn, there was not sufficient time remaining for him to learn whether his advice would be followed, he was obliged to proceed with his part of the plan agreed upon—To wit: to make the demonstration up Ferry branch, and hence were seen those portentous and well remembered signal rockets, arranged to be thrown off at the time designated for the joint attack.

If the original plan of attack had been carried out, it was then, at midnight, that the onset would have been made upon our entrenchments, when, if made by a direct movement in front, there is little doubt they would have met with a foretaste of what they afterwards encountered at New Orleans. Better for us, however, the advice of Admiral Cochrane was followed, and the attack relinquished. It was on the receipt of this missal from the naval commander, that Col. Brooke, succeeding to the command of the army, considering it an indication that he had not succeeded also to the confidence enjoyed by his "illustrious predecessor," is said to have been so chagrined as to shed tears of mortification!

There was not on the part of the enemy any expectation of carrying the city, or of doing more than to create a diversion, by the night attack up the Ferry branch—and it is confidently believed that the loss incurred in making it has always been greatly overated; yet that all the firmness of heart and gallantry claimed for the defenders at that point was justly due to them, there can be no question.

"It was," says your extract, "during the striking concussions of that night that the song of the Star-Spangled Banner was composed in the admiral's ship."

Now it is not unworthy of that noble inspiration that its circumstances should be more exactly known. The author of the Star-Spangled Banner was never on board the admiral ships after we were in sight of Baltimore. We had been invited during our detention to take up our quarters with the admiral's son, Sir Thomas Cochrane, on board the Surprise Frigate the admiral expressing regret that his own, the Flagship, was so crowded with officers that he could not accommodate us as he wished; but promised that his son (which he well redeemed) would make us comfortable until after the denouement of the expedition then going forward.

Dining every day with the admiral and a large party of army and navy officers, his objects and plans were freely spoken of, and thus when we arrived in sight of the city, the undersigned again demanded an answer to his despatches, to which Sir Alexander answered, smilingly, "Ah, Mr. S. after discussing so freely as we have done in your presence, our purposes and plans, you could hardly expect us to let you go on shore now in advance of us. Your despatches are all ready. You will have to remain with us until all is over, when I promise you there shall be no further delay." Seeing no help for it, I demanded that we should then be returned to our own vessel—one of Ferguson's Norfolk Packets, under our own "Star-Spangled Banner," during the attack. It was from her deck in view of Fort McHenry, that we witnessed through an anxious day and night,

"The rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air," and the song which was written the night after we got back to Baltimore, in the hotel then kept at the corner of Hanover and Market streets, was but a versified and almost literal transcript of our expressed hopes and apprehensions, through that ever-memorable period of anxiety to all, but never of despair. Calling on its accomplished author the next morning, he handed it to the undersigned, who passed it to the Baltimore Patriot, and through it to immortality.

Your obedient servant,

J. S. S.